

Time to talk about pay

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Time to talk about the Agenda for Change pay structure

UNISON is fighting on several fronts to make NHS pay better. We work through the Pay Review Body process for the annual pay uplift but we also work to maintain and improve the Agenda for Change (AfC) pay structure itself. This update tells members about what we are trying to do to refresh and renew the AfC structure.

For a number of years now UNISON members have told us about problems with the design of the AfC pay bands: they are too long; some pay points are too close together; there is too much overlap between bands; and pay at the bottom of the structure is too little to live on.

When the pay dispute in England was settled in 2015 we got agreement to hold talks with the employers and the Department of Health about refreshing the AfC pay structure to make it fit for the future.

Talks are proceeding with the NHS Employers – with the Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland administrations attending so they can decide about getting on board once we have some clear outcomes.

UNISON believes these talks are crucial to giving members hope of something more than a measly 1% annual uplift each year till 2020. They also provide an opportunity to try and restore a single UK pay structure through levelling up.

What we are talking about

We have been talking to the employers about a pay structure that is fairer, simpler and easier to understand:

1. Living wage for all

Introducing the Living wage as the pay floor across the whole of the NHS is long overdue. And moves already taking place in Scotland to re-profile Band 1 jobs need to be extended out across the UK.

2. Better, quicker

Reducing how long it takes to get to the top of the band – the rate for the job – will be fairer and better for staff morale. We want to use the current band maximums but hang a smaller number of pay points below them.

3. No more overlaps

At the moment there are considerable overlaps between the top of one pay band and the bottom of the next. This means jobs with higher job evaluation scores can be paid the same or less than lower-scoring jobs. This needs to be put right to ensure fair and equal pay for work of equal value.

What we are not talking about

UNISON has made it crystal clear that our members will not accept any moves to reduce payments for working unsocial hours. We have warned that, like the junior doctors, any such moves would provoke a damaging industrial dispute.

Is there any money to fund changes?

At the moment the employers are saying that any changes have to be cost neutral but this is not a position that UNISON is willing to accept. We want to focus on agreeing what changes the pay structure needs to make it fit for the future – we are confident we can show any additional costs will be of long term benefit to the service.

What happens next?

Talks are progressing slower than we would like as the employers and the Department of Health have been tied up on the junior doctors' dispute. When we have a draft package we will consult fully with members as will the other NHS trade unions. Look out for further updates in the coming months.